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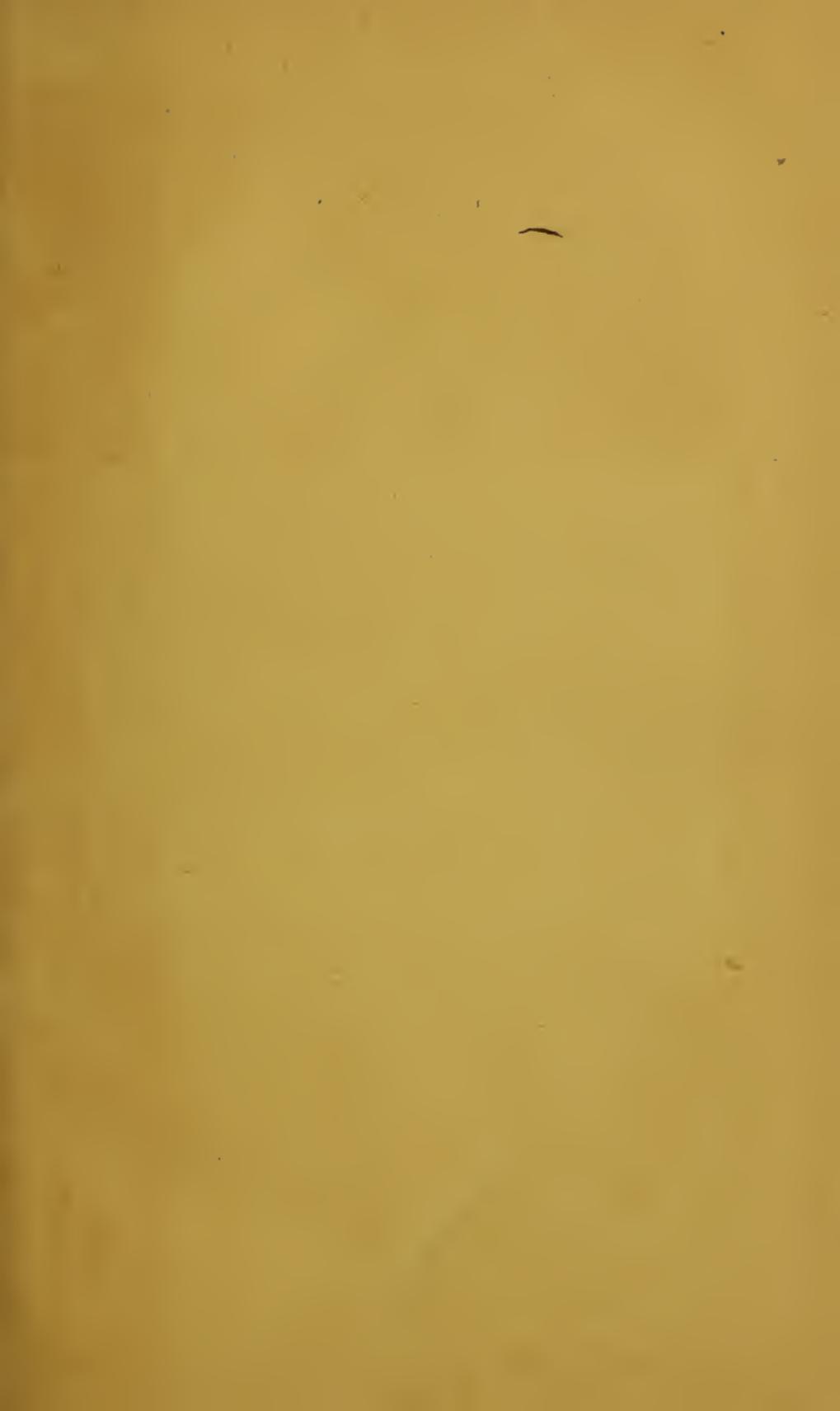
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THE
MISSION OF SORROW.

BY REV. GARDINER SPRING, D. D.

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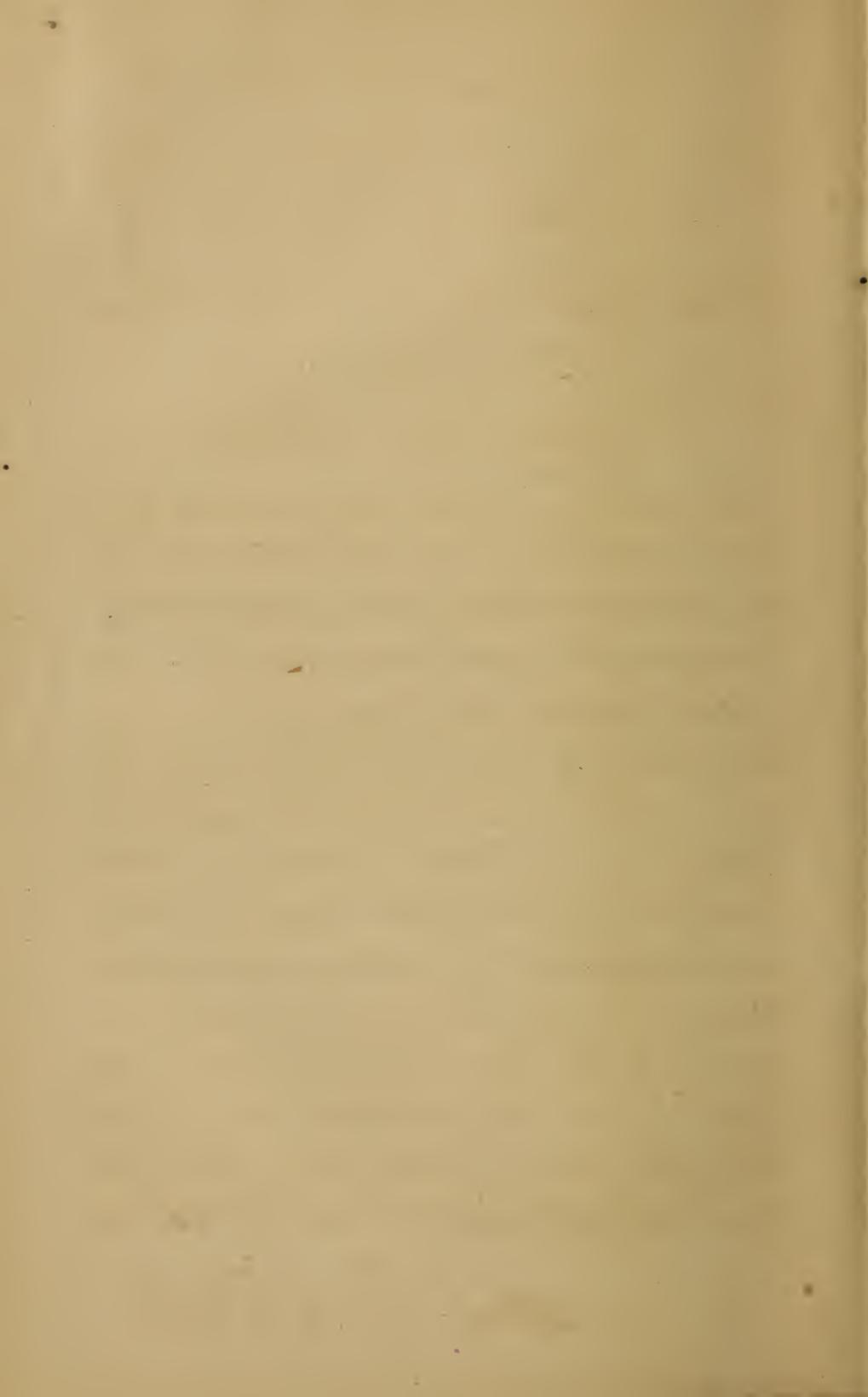
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THE MISSION OF SORROW.

I. SORROW GOD'S WITNESS.

IT must be a hard heart that is not touched with the sorrows of the bereaved. Our sympathy may give courage to the mourner, and relieve his solitude, even where it cannot alleviate his woes. Calamity in every form makes an appeal to every Christian mind for correspondent feeling, for fellowship, for counsel. The sorrows which for months past have inundated this land, and which now sweep over it like the waves of the sea, have been vividly present to the writer of these pages; and he would fain give utterance to a few thoughts in which his own heart beats in unison with the afflict-

ed. We weep with those who weep. "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." We "remember them which are in adversity, as being ourselves also in the body." We have all much to be thankful for, and much to mourn over. Sorrow has its approved mission. If the Father of mercies "doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men," there must be some reason for these inflictions—a "needs be" that is absolute and imperative. We should "hear the rod, and Him that hath appointed it."

Atheism is the great vice of the human mind. It is the nature of sin to be blindfold, especially to the existence and attributes and presence of the great Unseen. It is the element of sin to live at a distance from God. It is the refuge and triumph of sin, when "the fool hath said in his heart, *There is no God.*"

“The owl Atheism,
Sailing on obscene wings across the noon,
Drops his blue-fringed lids, and shuts them close,
And hooting at the glorious sun in heaven,
Cries out, *Where is it?*”

There is no more emphatic or terse description of wicked men than that they are “*without God in the world.*” This is their character, and leads to all their negligence, all their unbelief, and all the varied forms of their ungodliness. When once a man loses sight of the God of heaven, and has no abiding impressions of Him “in whose hand is the soul of every living thing,” who can measure or limit his roving, or tell where he will stop? Yet to this practical atheism men are everywhere exposed. The tendency to it is strong and seductive, and impelled by all the subtlety of him “who goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” Men live and go forth into the world, and look on its

beauty and its bloom, every planet and star reflecting the image of the Deity, every stream and summer cloud and breathing fragrance all with one voice vocal with his praise ; yet are they ignorant of God, estranged from God, alienated from God. What they are taught concerning him, they do not understand ; what they understand, they misinterpret ; what they do not misinterpret, they forget, and choose to forget, because they "do not like to retain God in their knowledge." The language of their hearts is, "Depart from us ; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." They have no notion of being controlled by "a Power above them," but rather shake off all impressions of religious obligation, that they may sin without restraint and without remorse..

It is a great thought to enter the mind that THERE IS A GOD. The knowledge

of God lies at the foundation of all knowledge, of all truth, all morality, all religion, all real and permanent happiness. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Just as the whole frame of the universe would totter to its foundation if there were no God, so all sense of moral obligation and all true religion have nothing to rest upon where God is not known. Men must be made to think of God, to see him in some measure as he is, guiding, directing, and governing all things after the counsel of his own will. They may not stop their ears when he speaks, nor flee from his presence when he comes near; rather must they acquaint themselves with him as a God at hand, and not a God afar off, and as a very present help in the time of trouble. And this is THE MISSION OF SORROW. It is God's

witness. It speaks for God to this thoughtless and suffering world.

Among the methods pursued in order to set this great and good Being before the minds of men, the Scriptures often advert to the afflictive dispensations of his providence. “THE LORD IS KNOWN BY THE JUDGMENTS WHICH HE EXECUTETH.” This is one of the laws of his kingdom. Severe judgments indicate his being, his presence, his displeasure. They testify to his agency in all the affairs of men, and trace them to the great First Cause. A truly devout mind, one would judge, finds some repose here. It is cold comfort to be told that “man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward,” and that it is the law of his being that he must be a sufferer. Yet so it is. It is not more a law of nature that bodies lighter than the atmosphere ascend, and those that are heavier descend towards

the earth, than it is the law of his being that he must be a sufferer. Every man knows this; but he would know more. And he may know more. The laws of nature are not fortuitous arrangements, but form the principles on which the God of nature conducts his wise and benevolent procedures throughout the physical creation. It is our joy to know that there is no such thing as chance in the kingdom of nature. Every thing is the result of design, and indicates the all-wise Designer. And is it less so in the moral world, and in the kingdom of grace? It would be a revolting thought that the sorrows, either of good or bad men, are uncaused, undirected, and that no all-seeing eye watches over them, and no unwearied arm restrains and controls them; and that while there is a wise and sovereign Arbiter, who balances the clouds and prepareth rain for the earth,

and maketh the grass to grow upon the mountains, who silences the storm, and says to the invader, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further," there is no such wise and benevolent supremacy over the thousand ills that flesh is heir to. Human life would be scarcely worth enjoying if blind fate were the arbiter. The more thoughtful and virtuous would reason as some of the wiser heathen reasoned, when, in their attempts to strike the balance between the good and the ill of man's existence, they were driven to the conclusion that it is a doubtful question whether existence is a blessing or a curse.

It is well that the Scriptures put this whole subject at rest, and explicitly instruct us, that whatever the form or degree of suffering in our world, it is *the visitation of God*. Sickness and poverty, drought and pestilence, embarrassment

and perplexity, bereavement and death—no matter what the trial, “affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.” “Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?” Be the means what they may, and the subordinate agents what they may: be they the sword of the enemy, or the sirocco of the desert; be they flood or fire; be they man’s malignity or his envenomed tongue, the hand of God is in all.

It is not always that we realize this great truth. We stop at second causes; yet second causes are but his messengers and do his bidding. And though there are sufferings so fearful that we almost hesitate at attributing them to his providence, yet is the responsibility of directing them one which he everywhere assumes, and which he well knows how to sustain and defend. We may never

know all the reasons of these dark dispensations, until the curtain is drawn aside and lets in upon them the stronger light of eternity. It is enough to know that, though they are the darker expressions of his nature we here behold, and behold with mingled awe and reverence, behind the cloud is the pure Spirit of the full-orbed Deity.

The bereaved *may* indeed, under severe bereavements, lose sight of the Sovereign Dispenser. They may grieve the Holy Spirit, and take refuge in some comfortless error, and be submerged in darkness and doubt, and sink in despondency and gloom. But this is not the fitting tendency of their afflictions. When the Lord of heaven and earth thus comes out of his place to judge his enemies or chastise his friends, he sets himself directly before their minds. When he poured his wrath on Egypt, and over-

threw Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea, it was that "his name might be declared throughout all the earth." When the Destroyer cut off one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the enemies of Israel in a single night, it was to teach Israel and their enemies, that God himself was in the midst of them. When the angel of the Lord smote Herod Agrippa, and he was eaten of worms ; when the proud Roman boasted that there was no other God but his sword, and he and his were consumed by lightning from heaven ; when the atheist monarch of Assyria affected divine honors, and in despair set fire to his palace and buried himself in its ruins ; when Nebuchadnezzar, for his presumptuous contempt of the Most High, was driven from among men to herd with the beasts of the field and eat grass like oxen ; and when Judas went and hanged him-

self—these and events like these announce the judicial, the executive Deity. Any one who reads the prophecy of Ezekiel with care, cannot but notice *the reason* there given for the desolating judgments spoken of in that prophecy. And what is it? More than seventy times, if I mistake not, it is given in the following words: “That MEN MAY KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD IN THE MIDST OF THE EARTH.” It has been well said that “God is in history;” and what lesson does the history of the world and the church inculcate, if not this, that “verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth?” Men are not apt to stop at second causes, and overlook the great First Cause, when a resistless providence throws them into the furnace. The foundations of their scepticism then give way. Atheism itself is constrained to confess that there is a God in heaven. It is no

earthly voice that speaks then. And it falls in the admonitory tones, "See now, that I, even I am he, and there is no strange God with me. I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand."

This is a lesson the mourner needs to learn. It is God himself that has smitten you, my afflicted friend. It becomes you to say with one of old, "I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because *Thou didst it.*" I repeat it, it was God himself, and not another, that struck the blow. And he meant to do it. "Behold, he taketh away. Who can hinder him; who shall say unto him, What doest thou?"

"'T is God who lifts our comforts high,
Or sinks them in the grave:
He gives, and blessed be his name,
He takes but what he gave."

He had a higher claim upon the departed than your fond affection can urge. The beloved one was not yours, but his—his creature, his property, created by him, cared for by him. And has he not a right to do what he will with his own ? He has not taken away more than belongs to him, nor any thing which he encouraged you to believe you should long enjoy. Your rights are limited and overruled by his. It is not willingly that he afflicts, yet wisely. The season of affliction is one he employs for high and holy purposes, and for nothing more high and holy than that men may know that he exists and governs, and is the Rewarder. When he “ bows his heavens and comes down, and darkness is under his feet,” it is that men may know that “ there is the hiding of his power.” And not unfrequently, at such seasons, there are thoughts and views which so

fill and absorb the mind, that God the Infinite One shuts out every other object. He has access to the mourners, and of set purpose places them in circumstances well fitted to lead them to see and acknowledge his hand. They are seasonable and well-timed instructions, and not unfrequently more effective and profitable than all other teaching, and constrain them to exclaim, "Who teacheth like him!" From blank atheism I know the mind starts back with horror; yet what multitudes are satisfied with a cold and speculative belief of the Divine existence, until they feel the weight of his resistless and invisible hand. It is not the name of God merely that constitutes the Deity, but those attributes and prerogatives which are inseparable from his existence, and of which men have such faint impressions until he speaks from the thick dark-

ness. God governs everywhere, but there are those who see him nowhere. His providence is concerned in every thing, but they see it in nothing. They exclude God from his own creation. They have a God in name, but not in reality. They are “without God in the world.” It is to this undutiful, ungrateful, presumptuous, and hopeless state of mind that sorrow comes to speak on God’s behalf, and to remind men how much he has to do with them, and they with him. As our views of God are, so is our religion. The mere thought of God, to a mind that feels it, has more weight than all other thoughts. It is with every man either every thing or nothing. It is every thing to the children of sorrow,

II. SORROW DESERVED.

ONE design of afflictions is to teach us that we deserve all that we suffer. No man who has a *conscience* will question that he is thus ill-deserving. So far from murmuring and cherishing the heart of a rebel, one would think that with the afflicted prophet he would say, “I will bear the *indignation of the Lord* until he plead my cause, because I have *sinned* against him.”

Afflictions have a *moral* as well as an efficient cause. God never afflicts simply because he chooses to do so. Arbitrary choice and power have no place in his government. Suffering is the sentence of justice, and not an act of sovereignty. “The curse causeless cannot come.” There is no suffering where there is no sin. The reason for all the

suffering in this sinful and sinning world, is the mournful fact that *it is* a sinful and sinning world. "Who ever perished, being innocent; or where were the righteous cut off?" The unfallen angels are not sufferers. So long as the fallen remained sinless, they were not sufferers. When this planet on which we dwell came from the hands of its Maker, it was a happy, because it was a holy world. The Tempter's foot had not trodden it, nor had it been poisoned by the venom nor polluted by the slime of the old Serpent. Our first parents were created capable of sensation, thought, and volition; their every sense and faculty was but the inlet and avenue of joy. The image of Him that created them had not been effaced from their pure minds, nor was it obscured or discolored. God himself was their supreme good, and they were happy. The heavens and the earth, every creature,

and every object and event around them ministered to their enjoyment. The ground was not then cursed, nor was it smitten with barrenness. They were not thorns and thistles which it brought forth, nor did savage beasts roam its mountains or its plains. There was no poisonous atmosphere, nor burning sun, nor stormy wind, nor creeping pestilence, nor bloody sword. Men did not sicken and die upon it, nor had it yet entered upon its sad career of mourning and tears. Every thing was fair, because it was unblemished—every thing beautiful, tranquil, and joyous, until its beauty was marred, its tranquillity disturbed, and its joys infected by sin.

Then all was changed. The ground was cursed. The air was cursed. The streams were cursed. The very flowers and plants of Eden were cursed for man's sake. Man himself was cursed. The

woman was cursed. And all their descendants are born under the curse. They inherit a fallen nature, are embryo sinners, and "go astray from the womb." The varied and complicated sorrows which now attend them from the cradle to the grave, whether they be individual, domestic, social, or public, are God's visitation for their iniquity. From that hour to the present, every pang that shoots through the bosom, every tear that falls upon the pallid face of sorrow, is a token of God's displeasure against sin and against man the sinner. Sorrow reads the lesson of unworthiness and ill-desert, and conveys to the proud and haughty mind the resistless, indelible impression of personal guilt and vileness.

Such is the light in which the divine oracles represent human suffering. "By one man sin entered into the world, and *death by sin*; and so death hath passed

upon all men, for that all *have sinned*." The terror by night and the arrow that flieth by day, the restless bed of sickness and of pain, and the pestilence that walketh in darkness, are faithful monitors. "When thou, O Lord, dost *rebuke man for his iniquity*, thou makest his beauty to consume away as the moth." The empire of suffering stands abreast with the empire of sin. There never was a sufferer who was not a sinner.

It is no cause of self-gratulation, when we are sufferers, that we have brought the suffering upon ourselves. Yet we cannot plead that we are guiltless. "Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee." See now that "it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God." If pain invades these senses, which were formed to be the avenues of pleasure, it is because we have sinned with our eyes and

ears and hands, and these senses have been our tempters. If lover and friend are put far from us, and our acquaintance into darkness, it may be because they have seduced our hearts from God. If riches take to themselves wings and fly away as an eagle towards heaven, it may be because we have made our wealth our strong city, and “said to the gold, Thou art my trust, and to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence.” If our fair name has been tainted by the breath of slander, or exposed to obloquy by indiscretions of our own, it is that we may be reminded how inordinately we have been “lovers of ourselves.” These are humbling thoughts, we know; yet is it no small satisfaction to know that God does not afflict us *unjustly*. It would be a fearful impression to struggle with, if we had the consciousness of not deserving rebuke, or if we were so deluded as to persuade

ourselves that these painful dispensations are uncalled for. I have met with more instances than one of this sort in the course of my ministry, and have ever felt that while they called for faithful instruction and reproof, they also demanded compassion and sympathy. It is a perilous position which a creature thus assumes of contending with his Maker, and has no tendency to diminish or assuage his grief. Our very dreams might cure us of this presumption. "In thoughts from the visions of the night," says the old patriarch, "when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face ; the hair of my flesh stood up." It was a messenger from the spirit land. "It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof : an image was before mine eyes, there was silence, and I heard

a voice, saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his Maker? Behold, he putteth no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly: how much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth?" We all confess that these are just sentiments. And they soothe the troubled heart. They charm away his grief when the sufferer thus bows before the throne, accepts the punishment of his iniquity, and ascribes righteousness to his Maker.

" Almighty power, to thee we bow ;
How frail are we, how glorious Thou :
No more the sons of earth shall dare
With an ETERNAL God compare."

Man is the creature of appetite and passion; and though the creature of reflection and conscience, he often complains of the severity of God's judg-

ments. He says within himself, *Wherefore is the heat of this great anger ; what have I done to deserve a blow like this ?* Come now, and let us reason together. Let such a one honestly attend to his own convictions, and inquire whether he is truly awake to a just sense of his obligations as God's creature. His conscience may not be so enlightened and sensitive as to lead him to feel the burden of his sins and the full weight of a self-condemning spirit. He may never have honestly made the divine law the rule of his duty, nor seen how broad it is. He may have congratulated himself on a decent exterior, not thinking that “man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” He may have thought of his fellow-men more than he has thought of God; honored them more than he has honored him, and sought their approbation and

favor more than his. What though you do not condemn yourself for your *immorality*, have you no reason to reproach yourself for your *ungodliness*? You may have overlooked your high privileges, and lost sight of those ends of divine love in the many and discriminating favors of a kind and gracious Providence towards you from your youth up. When you contrast God's treatment of you with your treatment of him, you may not feel so guiltless. You have been the child of his providence, the object of his care and bounty, and what return have you made to him who has thus loaded you with his benefits? Have you valued communion with him, and sought to enjoy his presence, or found in him and from him that peace and those joys which the world cannot give? Have you ever taken an honest retrospect of your own moral history? Whence is it, if you are not mar-

vellously ignorant of your own character, that you thus flatter yourself that your own unworthiness and ill-desert are not so great as those whose sufferings are less than your own ?

With such a state of mind as is often cherished by persons in affliction, it is no marvel they complain of the rod. They do not feel that they deserve it. Oh it is a dark state of mind—a dead, torpid, unfeeling state ; sensitive to bereavement and sorrow, but insensitive to unworthiness and ill-desert. The burden of sin is of all burdens the heaviest ; but there is a state of mind that makes light of sin, even when the heart stoops and bleeds under the burden of sorrow. Thou son, thou daughter of sorrow, look into thine own heart, look into thy closet and into thy Bible, and then ask conscience whether thy afflictions are not deserved.

Good men are not always faultless in this matter, but are sometimes like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. “Oh,” says the venerable patriarch, “Oh that it were with me as in months past, when the Almighty was with me, and my children were about me; when his candle shone upon my head, and by his light I walked through darkness. But now thou art become *cruel* unto me; with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself against me.” This was a bitter and unjustifiable complaint; yet was it from lips that had but a little before said, “Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?” Complaints like this were not the true index of Job’s character; for not long after this, and in the issue of his trials, he makes that memorable confession, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor

myself, and repent in dust and ashes." The children of God are not rebels. Even under the severest afflictions they have the consciousness of their sinful character, and of their indebtedness to his forbearing mercy; and the thought cools the febrile agitation of their heart, and bids it be still. "I am the man," says the weeping prophet in his mournful Lamentations, "that hath seen afflictions by the rod of his wrath. He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, and not into light. He turneth his hand against me all the day; he hath made my chain heavy. He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow. He hath filled me with bitterness, and made me drunken with wormwood. He hath broken my teeth with gravel stones; he hath covered me with ashes." Language is not easily found more vividly expressive of grief and despondency. He quailed be-

neath the rod. But did his pensive harp echo no cheering strain? Listen while God his Maker gave him “songs in the night.” He had time for reflection, for self-inspection and prayer; and in these retrospective and introverted thoughts, mourning and gratitude, the pensiveness and confidence of piety are sweetly combined. “Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall, my soul hath them still in remembrance, and is *humbled in me*. This I recall to my mind, therefore *have I hope.*” Nor does the triumph end here. There is the song of joy from the midst of the furnace. “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not *consumed*; because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness.” It was the light of heaven illuminating his darkness. And when he subjoins, “It is good for a man that he

bear the yoke in his youth ; he putteth his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope ;” and then adds, “ For the Lord will not cast off for ever, for though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion, according to the multitude of his mercies ;” and at last affirms the great and precious truth, “*for he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men*”— it is the strength of heaven, making him strong in weakness; it is the smile of heaven, chasing all gloom from his solitude and depression; it is the faithfulness of heaven, leaving upon the receding cloud “a rainbow round about the throne.”

Few thoughts have a more salutary influence upon the afflicted than a sense of their own unworthiness and ill-desert, especially when they contrast their afflictions with the abounding mercies of a munificent Providence. Think of your

ill-desert ; count your trials, and set them side by side with your enjoyments ; and then ask yourself if you have nothing left to be thankful for.

“If smiling mercy crown our lives,
Its praises shall be spread ;
And we ’ll adore the justice too
That strikes our comforts dead.”

III. SUBMISSION UNDER SORROW.

"At the funeral of President Davies, just as the people were about to take up the coffin, his mother, an aged widow, came to take the last look of her son. She gazed intently upon him; the tears fell upon the face of the corpse as she bent over it; and then, retiring a single step as she still gazed upon him, she exclaimed, '*There lies my only son, my only earthly comfort and earthly support. But there lies the will of God, and I am satisfied.*'" This was Christian submission.

Afflictions are sent as a test of this great trait of the Christian character. Rightly employed, they serve not only to bring out that character, but to produce and cultivate a satisfied state of mind. It does not consist in a stoical insensibility to trials; far from it. Nat-

ural affections were given us that we might weep ourselves, and weep with them that weep. Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus. It does not consist in having no will of our own; but in that chastened and subdued spirit which consents that the will of God should be done rather than our own will. There is no greater conquest over a supremely selfish heart than this. Many a man submits to God's will because he cannot help it; but forced submission is a contradiction. There is no acquiescence when he rebels as long as he can, and yields only because he *must* yield, and because God is stronger than he. There are those also who flatter themselves that they have a submissive spirit, when they have nothing to submit to. They are satisfied with the dispensations of Providence, because every thing smiles about them, and all their wishes are gratified. There is no

submission in this, and no subjugation of our will to the will of God, but rather a self-complacency, and a proud gratification of our own desires. Who ever thought of *submitting to a good*? There may be thankfulness for it; there ought to be; but there is no place for submission. It is only when the procedure of divine Providence countervails our own desires, arrangements, and hopes, and the bitter cup is put into our hands, that we *can* say, “Not my will, but Thine be done.” This was the spirit of our adorable and ever blessed Master, in view of such an aggregate and combination of suffering as the world never before saw, and will never see again; and it furnishes the highest exemplification of a submissive spirit.

The only difficulty in exercising a submissive spirit is, that men naturally love themselves more than God. When the

carnal mind that is enmity against God is subdued, and they love God more than themselves and more than all others, this very love to him, if in due exercise, will give the preference to his will above their own. If our wishes and our will are not so dear to us as God's, we shall have no desire to oppose his will in any thing. "What pleases *him* pleases *us*." If, on the other hand, we love ourselves better than God; if we love our treasures, our fame, our power, our children, our friends more than God, we cannot say, when he smites our idols, "It is well," because we have no such attachment to the divine will as leads us to subject our will to his.

Where there is no submission to God's will, afflictions give rise to morbid insensibility, discontent, murmuring, rebellion. Where it does exist, they prove its reality and its value. When the rod

of God is upon our habitation, and we can say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good;" when the bitter cup passes round, and we can say, "The cup which my Father giveth me, shall I not drink it?" when the burdened and afflicted soul "delights more in the will of God than in any thing that will can take away," who will say that afflictions are appointed in vain? One such thought, one such holy emotion, one such act of sweet submission to the divine will, called into exercise and cultivated by trials, is worth all the bereavements it costs. It will live and grow and be perpetuated when this world and its idols and idolatrous attachments have passed away. When Shimei cursed David, he could say, "Let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him." When the enemy fell upon the family of Job, and slew his children and servants; when the fire

burnt up his possessions, and a great wind from the wilderness smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, "Job arose and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground and worshipped, and said, The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." When the two sons of Aaron were suddenly made the victims of God's displeasure, "Aaron held his peace." Amid all the bitterness of their bereavements, they were happy men. They had no distrust of God. Unlike the troubled sea, their minds were tranquil. It was enough to be able to say, "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice." The Holy One of Israel delights in such a state of mind as this. It is of itself bright evidence of the reality of spiritual character. It is a prelibation of the river of life which flows from under the

throne of God and the Lamb. It is a blessed state of mind, and tinges with “its silver lining” the dark cloud of adversity.

Why then should the children of sorrow inwardly murmur or outwardly complain? God has taken your beloved one. And will you quarrel with God? Do you well to be angry? Oh bid this tumultuous heart be still.

“Peace all our angry passions then ;
Let each rebellious sigh
Be silent at his sovereign will,
And every murmur die.”

Has the God only wise acted hastily in this matter? Is it difficult for you to believe that perfect rectitude cannot do wrong, that infinite wisdom cannot err, and that infinite goodness never acts unkindly? If the Sovereign Dispenser were ignorant and unwise, if he were unreasonable and unjust, or if he were merely

indifferent to the sufferer's well-being, there might be ground for complaint. But there is no such God in the universe. A being of such attributes is *no God*.

We all feel our bereavements, and sometimes so keenly that our confidence in God is shaken, and breaks away from its strong foundations. This is all wrong. True piety is confiding, and gives its voice for God even when he "dwells in the thick darkness." Could we perceive the reasons and motives of his conduct as they lie in his own mind, unless we are rebels, we should be satisfied. God is a Rock; his work is perfect. These painful dispensations, as we have already seen, are designed to unfold his true character. In view of them, we may well say with the apostle, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearch-

able are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" We shall know more hereafter, and see more clearly how bright his wisdom and goodness shine in these dark dispensations. We cannot grasp infinity. It is asking too much of infinite Wisdom, that he should condescend to our littleness and abjectness, and see every thing as we see it.

"Lord, we are blind, poor mortals blind ;
We can't behold thy bright abode :
Oh, 't is beyond a creature mind
To glance a thought half way to God."

Poor blind creatures of a day, to desire that we and ours should be in our own hands rather than in his ! His hand reaches through all these checkered scenes of our earthly existence. It reaches to the chambers of sickness and the bed of death ; it reaches down to the grave, and up from the grave through all the successive generations of men, and all the

relations they bear to him and to one another, and to the eternity where he dwells. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us. "It is high; we cannot attain unto it." Let us not then sit in judgment on what *he does*, but "be still, and know that *he is God*."

What if he had not sent these trials upon you and yours? What if he had let you alone? Are you sure your trials would have been fewer or lighter, and your condition every way better than it now is? I say, are you *sure* of this? Are you sure the time will never come when you will see that it was better for you that you have been visited with the very trials at which you mourn so bitterly? Are you sure the departed one would have been as well cared for as it now is, and that you could have done as well by that beloved child as God has done? It was rightly the object of your

tenderest love and most cheering hopes. Are you sure that love would not have been grieved, and those hopes disappointed? Do you know that, foreseeing the dark shadows upon its pathway, love greater than yours, and purer, has not taken it from the evil to come, and housed it from the storm? Could you say, if it had lived, that "the days of its mourning are ended;" that it shall sin no more and weep no more? Could you have introduced it into "the general assembly and church of the first-born," where the spirits of just men are made perfect, where angels are its guardians and teachers, where "the glory of God enlightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof?" Why, why look so intently into the grave, and never beyond it? The departed are not there. It is but the mouldering clay tenement that slumbers. The intelligent, moral, and im-

mortal one is numbered among the millions of those ransomed ones, out of whose mouth God has perfected praise. A voice from that holy world repeats the injunction, "BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD." His arrangements in these bereavements may excite an idolatrous heart to complaint, and an unyielding heart to rebellion; but none but a selfish heart will complain, none but idolatrous attachments will rebel.

IV. SORROW DISTURBS IDOLATROUS ATTACHMENTS.

IN one form or another, all sin is idolatry. It is a violation of the command, "Thou shalt have no other gods BEFORE ME." It sets the creature above the Creator. It ignores the Supreme Good, and sets up some created good in his place ; forsaking the Fountain of living waters, and hewing out to itself cisterns, broken cisterns that hold no water.

Apostate man all the world over does this. Though formed with capacities which nothing but God can fill, he has lost his relish for the Unseen and Eternal, and seeks his highest good in the seen and temporal. This love of the creature, no longer kept in its proper place by the predominating love of the Creator, becomes an idolatrous attach-

ment. And it is a ruinous attachment. It is the ruin of nations, the ruin of worldly men, and but for interposing grace, it would be the ruin of Christians. Nor is there any thing that has a stronger tendency to weaken and break off this idolatrous attachment than afflictive dispensations.

It is altogether too favorable an opinion of human nature to suppose that men are apt to grow better under the smiles of prosperity. History teaches nothing more emphatically than that unmixed prosperity is one of the chief sources of national and individual degeneracy. “Pride and fulness of bread” embolden wickedness, inflate insolence, become the aliment of angry dissension, collisions of interest, and pervading corruption. The Most High once said to the nation of Israel, “I spake unto thee in thy prosperity, and thou saidst, I will

not hear ; this has been thy manner from thy youth.” It was the reproach of the Jew, that the apostle Paul was constrained to say to him, “*Not knowing* that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.” God gave this people their request, but sent leanness into their souls. It is an instructive and affecting record, that “when he *slew* them, then they sought him ; and they returned and inquired early after God ; and they remembered that God was their Rock, and the high God their Redeemer.” The nations that once figured so prominently on the page of history, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and their far-famed cities, where emperors and statesmen and philosophers and bards and merchants and bankers filled the world with fame and folly, were swept away from the pinnacle of their wealth, and from the pomp of their power. We could not live in a

world so morally corrupt as this, were it not restrained and held in awe by the divine judgments. The church of God would not be safe. There would be no protection to liberty and law, no domestic and no public security, no Sabbath and no sanctuary, were it not for those “terrible things in righteousness” by which the God of our salvation has so often arisen to plead and maintain his own cause. The overthrow of Sodom and the cities of the plain, the plagues of Egypt, the destruction of the ancient and idolatrous Canaanites, the breaking up of the Hebrew state and monarchy, and the dispersion of the Jews, stand forth before the world not more certainly as judgments upon the enemies of truth and righteousness, than as blessings to the people of God. It is right that he should execute judgments. The world needs them. Public and punitive dis-

pensations consult high interests, and terminate in the glory of his great name.

As with nations, so it is with individuals. They need to be taught, that in seeking their highest good on earth, they are seeking it where it is not to be found. The supreme love of the creature is the ruin of the soul. Not many years since, a military officer in our land exclaimed on his bed of death, "The world—the world has ruined me!" The experience of millions attests the truth and importance of those teachings of the divine oracles which instruct us that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God," and that "no man can serve God and mammon." From the heavens and the earth, from the chambers of the dying and the graves of the dead, from the unsatisfying nature of all things beneath the sun, from the sin and pollution of a world that lieth in wickedness, from hard-

hearted hate and hard-handed oppression, from tribulation and distress in all their forms, the admonition reaches us, “Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest, because it is polluted.” One of the most distinguished and successful preachers of the gospel in this land once said, “Until men have taken an everlasting leave of the world, and shut themselves up in a convent, or in hell, the love of the world is the principal way in which they stray from God—the principal affection which takes the place of love to him. It is *the great road to perdition*; or if the gate of hell is shut by the grace of God, it is the great road to darkness, temptation, and distress.”

The psalmist understood the gracious design of affliction when he wrote the one hundred and nineteenth psalm. “It is *good* for me that I have been afflicted. Before I was afflicted, I went astray;

but now have I kept thy word." Elsewhere he says, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me." It was when "he was in affliction" that the vile and bloody Manasseh "besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers." The afflicted patriarch had comfort in the thought when he said, "He knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." "In their affliction," says another prophet, "they will seek me early."

A principal element of this day of grace is, that it is a *state of trial*. Under this gracious arrangement every thing is bringing the character of men to the test. Instruction tries it; prosperity tries it; adversity tries it. And for the most part, the great question to be decided is, whether God's creatures love the world

more than him. This probationary process goes on with different and opposite results. Some there are who become worse under affliction. God said of a portion of his revolting people, "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." He instructed the prophet Amos to say to backsliding Israel, "I have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your palaces; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. And I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. I have smitten you with blasting and mildew; I have sent among you the pestilence, after the manner of Egypt; your young men have I slain with the sword; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. I have overthrown some of you as God overthrew Sodom and Go-

morrah, and ye were as a brand plucked out of the burning ; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." This was fearful and stiff-nickled obduracy ; and where God means to subdue it, he sends other and greater judgments ; and where these fail of breaking the hard heart, his patience becomes wearied, and his language is, " Why should they be stricken any more ? they will revolt more and more." It is a fearful procedure when God does this, and leaves the worldling to his own heart's lusts.

But while some become worse under afflictions, some become better. Afflictions awaken the conscience of the most obdurate, restrain the wicked in their sinful courses, and in defiance of their own purposes and arrangements, arrest and detain and stop them in their downward career. Many is the man who has been kept from falling, who, without

them, had sunk deep into the eternal pit. Afflictions not only often reclaim men from courses of wickedness in which they have long indulged, but not unfrequently produce the physical incapacity for pursuing them. Many a man has been laid upon a bed of sickness, or has lost a limb, or become blind or deaf or palsied, that he might be kept from wickedness which it was in his heart to perpetrate.

Could the religious history of the people of God be narrated in detail, how many of them, think you, would attribute their first religious impressions to some sad and solemn call of divine Providence? The arrow that first pierced many an adamantine heart would be traced to disappointments they little thought of—to the poverty they dreaded, to reproach and shame, or to the grave of those they loved. God accom-

plishes his purposes of mercy in his own way. The purpose comprises the means as well as the end; severed from the means, there is no purpose. Affliction is often essential to the accomplishment of his gracious design. Multitudes never would have become Christians but for pain and bereavement and losses; and after they became Christians, never would their backsliding have been healed but for the severity of their trials. But for these paternal chastisements, they would have wandered beyond the hope of recovery. God thought of them when they did not think of him, and restored their souls and led them in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

I have seen the benefit of afflictions, and have many a time wondered at the wisdom and the benevolent and gracious design which ordered and directed them.

The giddy have become thoughtful, because God smote their idols. The worldling has lost his interest in the things of time, because the hand of God has touched him. The man of genial temperament, and social habits, and instructive and pleasant converse, loses his relish for society, and is shrouded in gloom and dumb with silence, because his heart and his hopes lie buried in the grave. Nor is this all. His conscience has been disturbed with inward pangs ; and while the arrows of the Almighty stuck fast in him and were drinking up his spirit, God has turned his mourning into joy and his sad lamentations into praise.

Such is the history of many a thoughtless sinner. That young widow's heart had never found its rest in God, unless it had first been buried in her husband's grave. That daughter of mirth turned from her idols to the living God, not

until she called to mind the last counsels and the parting kiss of a sainted mother, and learned that God "had chosen her in the furnace of affliction." Many a heart thus broken has thus been healed. Disciplined and discouraged by tribulation, it has found the God of heaven its refuge and strength, and reposed in him without whom the whole circle of human joys is vanity. Sorrow has driven them from the world to God. It has shown them the imbibited streams, and led them to the pure Fountain. It has shown them their weakness, and taught them to take hold of Him "who giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." And now, instead of sitting alone and keeping silence, their language is, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us

up." The mourner is then blessed, though he walk in the midst of trouble. The agitated and trembling heart has found a refuge from the storm, a strength to the needy in his distress, "a shadow from the heat when the blast of the terrible ones is as the storm against the wall." When sorrow comes on such an errand, the house of mourning reads the lesson that there is something to rest upon besides this perishing world, and something more sacred than the attachments which terminate on earth. The soul then forgets its misery, and remembers it as the waters that pass away. She takes her harp from the willows, and sings, "Be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted." It is a new song when the child of sorrow is thus enabled to say with the apostle,

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we are comforted of God."

Sorrow preaches as no pulpit ever preached. If "he that converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins," this forbidding messenger of mercy will have crowns of rejoicing not a few in the day of the Lord Jesus. If in taking away all the mourner has loved on earth, it has given him all that is more loved in heaven; if it has robbed him of time, to give him eternity; if it falsifies the expectations of the world, and verifies purer and brighter hopes; if when the soul had lost its way, and knew not how to return to its great ob-

ject and end and chief good, sorrow comes commissioned from a world of joy "to seek and save that which is lost," it has a salutary and deserves a welcome mission.

V. SORROW THE FRIEND OF THE CHRISTIAN GRACES.

THE children of God have much to struggle with. Their vocation, high and holy as it is, has a martial aspect. It is a protracted conflict, in which they find it necessary not only to act on the defensive, but to be the aggressors. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." To the peculiarity of the conflict in the first ages of the Christian church, there ever has been and is now superadded the ordinary and never ceasing conflict with that spirit of the world which is enmity with God.

It is not only true, as has been already intimated, that the love of the

world is the ruin of worldly men, it is the besetting sin of Christians. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," in some of their insinuating and protean forms, are evermore ensnaring them. The best of men love the world far more than they ought. Nor are they always sensible of its depressing and secularizing power. It eclipses their faith, and limits and obscures their spiritual vision. It allures their affections from God, embarrasses their contemplations of the realities of eternity, and is not unfrequently so entwined about their heartstrings, that they have lost the life and soul of religion, and for a time appear in no way different from other men.

In miserable and criminal concurrence with these outward exposures, there are strong tendencies, from "the sin that dwelleth in them," not only to insensi-

ble aberrations from the straight and narrow way, but to conscious and obvious backsliding. The enemy is subtle, and the conflict severe. “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh ; and these are contrary the one to the other.” The under-current of inbred apostasy is strong, and so resists and inmingles itself with the pure river of life, that the purer waters are like the troubled sea.

God does not mean that his own children should always remain thus undistinguished from the world that lieth in wickedness. We know that “all are not Israel who are of Israel.” There are tares among the wheat. And though it belongs not to men to sever the just from the unjust, and although they may grow together till the harvest, the difference between them is often disclosed before the harvest sets in. If any of those who

profess to be the friends of God and followers of his Son are false to their profession, he is very apt to make their unfaithfulness and hypocrisy appear, and to place them in circumstances in which their deception shall vanish like shadows before the sun, and their deceitful profession shall stand out before the church and the world. Nor is it less true that the same dispensations of his providence which detect and bring out the hypocrisy of those who have a name that they live and are dead, disclose and discover the sincerity and truthfulness of those who have more than the form of godliness.

An intimate acquaintance with the biography of good men, among other wonders of his grace, shows that the Father of mercies is wont to place his true friends in circumstances which prove their Christian integrity, and invigorate and bur-

nish their graces. By early covenant he gave them to his Son, and not one of them shall be lost, nor suffered to remain undistinguished from his recognized foes. The promise is explicit: “If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.” He loves his Son too well to violate his covenant with *him*, and he loves his people too well to violate his covenant with *them*, and allow them to rest undisturbed in their idolatrous attachments.

He has a cure for their spiritual declension and their outward backsliding. He casts them into the furnace: he tries them as silver is tried. If the dross is massive and unyielding, he heats the furnace seven times more than it is wont to be heated, until the mass melts away and

is consumed. This he himself declares to be his object in these afflictive dispensations. "Behold," says he, "I will melt them and try them; for how shall I do for the daughter of my people?" When he does this, and they endure the trial, they come forth like gold seven times purified. They return to him from whom they have revolted; their graces are stronger and brighter, and shine in all the beauties of holiness. There is a meaning in their afflictions, and the more emphatic as there is a reality and depth in them when they thus give brightness to their spiritual armor, and crown their conflicts with progressive victories.

The burning arrows of temptation are ordinarily showered upon the soul of the believer during the seasons of thoughtless prosperity. These fiery darts do not often fly in the valley of Baca; desolation and sorrow quench them. Such

is sorrow's mission, and such is the voice of experience, and it is but an echo from the divine oracles. "Blessed is the man," say they, "that endureth trials; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life. Count it all joy when ye fall into divers trials; knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience; but let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. Now no chastening for the *present* seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby." *Afterward*: the ploughshare struck deep; the seed requires time to ripen.

"The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower."

It is not often that a truly Christian mind long languishes under the gloom of

sorrow. Dejected it may be; but there is an exhilarating power in the truths on which God has caused him to hope. Languish it may; but there are graces within, which, like plants of righteousness shrouded in darkness, are perpetually tending towards the light, and eventually emerge into the sunlight of spiritual joy.

Not only do these spiritual emotions break up the settled gloom, but bring with them a deeper and stronger consciousness of adoption into the family of God. The mourner feels that the chastening is from the faithful hand of paternal love. Under the cheerful sunshine of prosperity, many a good man has been so absorbed and gratified in the objects of time and sense, that he had little or no religious enjoyment. His joys were elsewhere. He could not say with the rejoicing thousands of Israel, "Let them

that love thy name be joyful in thee ; shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him ; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King, and glory in the Holy One of Israel.” Far from this. They sought him, but they could not find him. They “went forward, but he was not there ; backward, but they could not see him ; on the right hand where he doth work, but he hid himself from them ; on the left hand, but they did not behold him.” Now, since the waves of sorrow began to roll over them, they find that God alone is their refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. He is now their satisfying portion ; and though every thing else is fading and dying around them, they can say with the psalmist, “The LORD LIVETH ; and blessed be MY Rock ; and let the God of my salvation be exalted.”

God may be seen and enjoyed every-where ; but it is in the dark passages of our pilgrimage, in the depths of disappointed and fond expectations, on the bed of languishing, and in the death-chambers of those we love, that the light of his countenance most cheers us. They were days of fearful solemnity and sanguinary persecution when the apostle Paul wrote his rich epistle to the Christians in Rome. Nothing but the sharpest trials gave rise to such thoughts as these : “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have *peace with God* through our Lord Jesus Christ ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*. And not only so, but we *glory in tribulation also* ; knowing that tribulation worketh patience ; and patience, experience ; and experience, hope ; and hope maketh not ashamed, because

the *love of God* is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Who does not see the hallowed influence of abounding trials upon his abounding faith and heaven-imparted love? Who can read the eighth chapter of this epistle without perceiving that such noble thoughts and unwavering confidence were not the offspring of a tranquil age? What writer, except one from the cliffs of the beetling storm, or the submerged cavern, or the lions' den, or the "mountain of the leopards," ever uttered the triumphant language, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Noble man! Sufferer signally favored! Thoughts and emotions cheaply purchased by his participation with the sufferings of his suffering Lord. How far above the sorrows of nature are the consolations of grace. How far superior to the depressions of nature is the triumph of faith. Afflictions are not useless when grace becomes victorious. It is a beautiful remark of *Pascal's*, in a letter occasioned by the death of his father, "There is no consolation but in truth. All trial is sweet in Jesus Christ. He suffered and died to sanctify death and suffering. See in the magnitude of our woes the great-

ness of our blessings, and let the excess of our grief be the measure of our joy." We love to have the providence of God smile upon us, and we often murmur when it frowns, even though we have so often found that it is safer for us that it should not always smile. It is recorded of ancient Israel, that "God gave them their request, but sent *leanness* into their souls." This is not what the Christian desires. When God frowns upon us, we should be less anxious for exemption from the suffering, than for grace to endure it. "Grace for grace," faithful grace, abundant grace—this is what the Christian needs, what he prays for, and that which follows in the footsteps of the Destroyer. Better, unspeakably better is it to enjoy the Divine presence and the light of his countenance, without our idols, than to have our idols without his favor. Oh, what wanderers should we

be, if God did not sometimes hedge up our way with thorns. Surely it is not for want of love to his people that he sorely chastises them. David could say, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust; quicken thou me, according to thy word." God heard his prayer, and sent him penitent and sorrowing to his knees. That sweet Christian poet William Cowper could "sing of mercies and of judgments," and in strains such as angels use, and rarely in sweeter tones than when he indited the hymn, "O for a closer walk with God." Sanctified trials had taught him to say,

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from thy throne,
And worship only Thee.

So shall my walk be close with God,
Calm and serene my frame;
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads me to the Lamb."

I have seen, I have *felt* the Christian graces wither under the burning sun of prosperity ; and I have *seen* them “revive as the corn, and grow as the vine,” when these scorching rays were intercepted by clouds. The love that prefers God to creatures ; the penitence and humility that have learned to “go softly,” because they have “heard the rod and Him who hath appointed it;” the peace that tranquillizes ; the fear that fills the soul with holy reverence ; the hope that looks for brighter days ; the joy that “glories in tribulation,” looms up under the darkest skies. From the deepest vale of humiliation the eye of faith discovers streaks of light from the mountain of God’s holiness ; and though dark clouds hang over it, streams of mercy flow down through their selected and grief-worn channels, filling the soul from all the fulness of God. Well does the

Father of mercies say to each of his mourners, "*My son*, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of his correction. For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." His own Son, his only Son, his well-beloved Son, was "made perfect through suffering." God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. Blind unbelief naturally errs in its interpretations of his providence. "What *son* is he whom the Father chasteneth not?"

"Those we call *wretched* are a *chosen band*.
Amidst my list of blessings infinite,
Stands this the foremost, that *my heart has bled*.
For all I bless thee; *most for the severe*."

VI. SORROW TAKING LESSONS FROM
THE BIBLE.

SORROW finds no relief from the mere teachings of human reason. The lessons of pagan philosophy, even from some of the most accomplished minds the world has known, do but make it the more bitter. A celebrated orator and statesman, who flourished more than a century before the Christian era, furnishes us an instructive illustration of this thought. Marcus Tullius Cicero was from an ancient and equestrian family in Italy, of superior talents and culture, of military as well as academic training, scarcely less distinguished for his philosophy than his eloquence, and rose to the highest dignities of the state with no other recommendation than his personal merits. No man in Rome enjoyed a higher de-

gree of popular favor, and no one was more deservedly hailed as “the father and deliverer of his country.” But he was a disappointed man—a man of sorrow, driven into exile, a desponding wanderer in foreign lands, his property confiscated, his family persecuted, an idol daughter torn from him by death, himself beheaded by a Roman centurion, and his head and hands carried to Rome. Pagan biography may be safely challenged to furnish a purer, brighter character than that of Cicero, or a more undeserved overthrow of earthly hopes, and sudden fall from the eminence of popular favor, wealth, and power, to the depths of poverty, dependence, dishonor, and death.

It may be instructive to inquire what were the resources and what the refuge of *such a man* in the season of adversity. He had no Bible for his teacher, and no

God to go to. He was familiar with the teachings of the schools, and all the questions which relate to the academic philosophy. He himself had written a treatise in which he discusses the opinions of the sages of antiquity respecting the chief good and chief end of man; and also large treatises devoted to the consideration of topics most essential to human happiness. And now, in the hour of trial, what is his solace, and whence his consolation? His first severe affliction was his banishment from Rome. His enemies were triumphant, and in one respect he was like the king of Israel when driven from Jerusalem. He loved Rome, and would fain have thrown some guardian shield around her. But alas,

“The heathen in his blindness
Bows down to wood and stone.”

“A little before his exile, he took a small statue of Minerva, which had long been

reverenced in his family as a kind of tutelar deity, carried it to the capitol, and placed it in the temple of Jupiter, under the title of *Minerva, the guardian of the city.*" He had nothing else to cheer him when he turned his back upon his beloved Rome. It was a dark hour; they were overwhelming sorrows that invaded him; but his only refuge was a marble statue in the temple of Jupiter! Such is paganism; such are the consolations of natural religion; such was the hope of the noblest man in Rome without the Bible.

A lacerating bereavement awaited him on his return to Rome, in the death of that remarkable and accomplished woman his daughter *Tullia*. His grief was inconsolable, and his lamentations most bitter. He had no comforter. Mind and body seemed to be sinking under the burden. Vain was all his philoso-

phy to fortify himself against this overwhelming disaster. Philosophers came from all parts to comfort him ; but they could not convince him that pain and misfortune and death are no evils. They could not wipe away his tears, nor lighten his burden. He thought and read, but found nothing to relieve his despondency. Cæsar wrote to him an affectionate letter of condolence ; Brutus wrote another, "so friendly and affectionate that it greatly moved him;" Servius Sulpicius also wrote another, "which is thought to be a masterpiece of the consolatory kind," and which closes with the thought, that it is "unbecoming the character and dignity of such a man as Cicero to be thus inconsolable, and that he who had borne prosperity so nobly, should bear adversity with the same moderation." But philosophy had no drops of consolation to pour into his bit-

ter cup. He retired to a little island on the Latian shore, there, amid woods and groves, to bury himself in solitude and tears. He lost all his cheerfulness. "In the ruin of the republic," he says, "I still had Tullia; but by this last cruel wound all the rest, which seemed to be healed, are broken out again afresh." Unrelieved by the counsels of his friends, he himself wrote his treatise "*De Consolazione*," with a view to employ his mind and mitigate the anguish of his sufferings. His biographer informs us that this treatise was much read by the primitive fathers, especially Lactantius. Yet strange to say, his main consolation and the main object of the treatise was to vindicate the propriety of paying divine honors to the dead; to urge the erection of a temple to her memory, as one "now admitted into the assembly of the gods;" to gratify his fond affection, and to per-

mit his grief to evaporate at the shrine of the departed.

Such is Paganism. Such is the state of mind in Christian lands where the truths of God have no access. I have dwelt upon it, because I do not know that human reason, unenlightened by the gospel, can prescribe any better cure for the sorrow-stricken mind.

We turn from it all to the thought of the psalmist, "Thou hast magnified THY WORD above all thy name." Among the varied and accumulative proofs that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the word of God, is its adaptation to the character of man, not only as a sinner, but as *a sufferer*. It not merely provides ample securities for the peace of the guilty, but abundant consolations for the comfort of the miserable. Men feel the burden of their sorrows;

they struggle with it; they groan under the yoke, but find no relief. They cannot avoid it; it is upon them. They cannot combat it; it is stronger than they.

The insufficiency of natural religion is never more apparent than to the consciousness of a sufferer. A survey of the earth on which we dwell discovers so much suffering, that for all that human philosophy can teach us, it appears to be inconsistent with that infinite wisdom and goodness which direct and control the affairs of men. We see the spoiler everywhere; invading the habitations of the best of men as well as the worst; blighting their hopes, resting like a heavy cloud upon the fairest portion of man's earthly heritage, multiplying his trophies in the tears of the living and amid the silence of the dead, and sometimes thrusting in his sickle as though the har-

vest of the earth were fully ripe. And we cannot help inquiring, *Why is this?* Why, under the control of unerring wisdom and infinite goodness and almighty power, is this vast aggregate of human suffering allowed thus to accumulate? Why, rather, does it exist at all; and why should humanity groan under it a single hour?

A thinking pagan like Seneca or Cicero would naturally propose this question to himself; but he would in vain seek for a solution of the problem. His philosophy is a synopsis of doubts, of suppositions, of theories, of vague conjectures, and at the same time of deep and powerful reasoning. Yet none of its conclusions bring peace and consolation to the miserable. It is a sad philosophy, a melancholy philosophy; profoundly melancholy, and profoundly sad.

“ Let all the heathen writers join
To form one perfect book ;
Great God, if once compared with thine,
How mean their writings look.”

To a struggling sufferer, depressed and broken-hearted, the teachings of natural religion are like the scathing winds of autumn and the cold breath of winter. They chill the soul, and drive it back into its own dark and hopeless dungeon. There is no Sun of righteousness there with healing in its wings. The highest intellectual and moral culture of pagan lands is a stranger to the source and author, the aim and end of human woes. It does not meet the exigencies of the mourner; it has no mission to “ bind up the broken-hearted.”

Amid such shadows as these the light of THE GOSPEL shines with fresh brilliancy. There heart-comforting truths are revealed, and heart-comforting scenes portrayed. “ Blessed are they that

mourn ; for they shall be comforted. As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. Though the fig-tree do not blossom, and there be no fruit in the vine ; the field shall yield no meat, the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls ; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil ; for thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Why art thou cast down, O my soul ? and why art thou disquieted within me ? hope thou in God ; for I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”

Here is Bible consolation. There is not one of these precious declarations but is as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, and as rivers of water in a dry place. Martyrs have hugged their fetters, and clanked their chains, and saluted their executioners with affectionate endearments, because light and immortality are brought to light in the gospel. The promises of God, Oh they are like the dew of heaven upon the arid and exhausted heart of the mourner ; they are like the breath of heaven, and redolent with its love ; they are the life of the soul, transforming its sorrows into joys. I have often thought of those touching appellations which are given to the Great Supreme, especially in the relation he sustains to the sons and daughters of sorrow. The apostle Paul speaks of him as "THE GOD OF CONSOLATION ; elsewhere he speaks of him as

the God of all comfort. He is styled the WIDOW'S HUSBAND AND DEFENDER, and the FATHER OF THE FATHERLESS. He is revealed in the New Testament as THE COMFORTER, and as though there were no other. Under his wise and gracious administration, suffering becomes the parent of joy: the wife loses her husband, that she may have God for her portion and guide; the parent loses his child, that he may have God for his Father; the rich lose their wealth, that the living God may be their portion; the ambitious and aspiring lose their honors, that He may be "their glory, and the lifter up of their head."

When the celebrated Dr. Samuel Johnson was called to follow a beloved wife to the grave, though no preacher of the gospel, he wrote her funeral-sermon. Among many excellent thoughts in this discourse, he says, "To afford adequate

consolation to the last hour, to cheer the gloomy passage through the valley of the shadow of death, and to ease that anxiety to which beings prescient of their own dissolution, and conscious of their own danger, must be necessarily exposed, is the privilege *only* of revealed religion. To bring life and immortality to light, to give such proofs of our future existence as may influence the most narrow mind and fill the most capacious intellect, to open prospects beyond the grave in which thought may expatiate without obstruction, and to supply a refuge and support to the mind amid all the miseries of decaying nature, is the *peculiar excellence of the gospel of Christ*. Without this heavenly instructor, he who feels himself sinking under the weight of years, or melting away by the slow waste of lingering disease, has no other remedy than obdurate patience, a gloomy

resignation to that which cannot be avoided."

The time will come when the wise as well as the unwise will appreciate this great truth, and when "every one that thirsteth" will draw water from these wells of salvation. In Christian lands the mission of sorrow and the mission of the gospel stand abreast. Christian ministers, like their divine Lord, are ministers of mercy. Their observation and their testimony come to us from the chambers of sickness and the house of mourning. And what are they? "I have seen," said a departed man of God, not many years ago the adornment of the American pulpit, "I have seen this Gospel hush into a calm the tempest raised in the bosom by conscious guilt. I have seen it melt down the most obdurate into tenderness and contrition. I have seen it cheer up the broken-heart-

ed, and bring the tear of gladness into eyes swollen with grief. I have seen it produce and maintain serenity under evils which drive the worldling mad. I have seen it reconcile the sufferer to his cross, and send the song of praise from lips quivering with agony. I have seen it enable the most affectionate relatives to part in death, not without emotion, but without repining, and with a cordial surrender of all they held most dear, to the disposal of their heavenly Father. I have seen the fading eye brighten at the promise of Jesus, ‘Where I am, there shall my servant be.’ I have seen the faithful spirit released from its clay, now mildly, now triumphantly, to enter into the joy of its Lord.” In all the pages of human philosophy, where are to be found consolations like these?

Affliction is also the best expositor of God’s word. No small part of it is es-

pecially addressed to the children of sorrow. To a sufferer languishing on the couch of debility and pain—to a mourner depressed and desolate under crushing bereavements, there are no themes of contemplation so well timed and welcome, nor any so fitted to heal the heart already bruised to tenderness, as these precious counsels of heavenly love. It is the voice of heaven, even though it comes on the cold night air, or the bloody battle-field, or the ingulfing ocean, or the poisoned atmosphere. It is like the angel messenger in the Garden. The children of sorrow are sensitive ; their minds are easily arrested by God's truth ; they read it, they hear it, they turn it over in their thoughts as they are not wont to do in the days of cheerfulness and mirth. Martin Luther says "he never understood the book of Psalms until he was in trouble." Again

he says, “It was tribulation made me understand the Bible.” Its richness, its beauty, its power are more than ever then seen and felt. We more than believe it; we know it, we feel it; it is in-wrought in our experience. We listen with gratified earnestness and grateful emotion to its promises, as though they were something new. Who but the child of sorrow ever appreciated the beauty and force of such cheering words as the following: “When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.” Creatures are broken cisterns, that hold no water. The mourner wearies in his search; his tongue failleth for thirst, until he finds rivers opened even on the sandy and barren places of his pilgrimage, and enjoys in the desert the cedar and the myrtle and the fig-tree

and the pine and the box-tree together. How many millions of God's afflicted ones have hailed the light of that comprehensive and cheering promise : "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Redeemer." Oh, it is like the moon "walking in her brightness" through a night of storms. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me," says the promised Messiah, "because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-

hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound ; to comfort all that mourn ; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness ; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." There is no book like the Bible in the time of trial. "Blessed is the man," says the Psalmist, "whom thou chasatest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy word." God's truth is unchanging and eternal. Once planted in the soul, it shall bring forth fruit. One lesson truly learned from it, and that would not have been otherwise learned, is worth all our tears. It was no undue estimate of it that led one of old to say, "Unless thy law had been my delight, I should have perished in

mine affliction. Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me; yet thy commandments are my delight." I pity the man who, in the day of trial, is ignorant of the Bible. The bright and permanent realities of God's truth are alone able to cheer him. In every view this book of God is a most wonderful book. To an afflicted man it occupies a place which no other can occupy. Infinite intelligence and infinite love only could have made it what it is. Human wisdom has no part in it. It shines by its own light, is hallowed by its own sanctity, embalmed in its own love. It is sorrow's "silent comforter."

"There no delusive hope invites despair;
No mockery meets you, no delusion there;
The spells and charms that blinded you before,
All vanish there and fascinate no more."

There is a voice from that new-made grave saying to them that mourn, Prize

these messages of heavenly wisdom and tenderness. They come from the “spirit-land.” However bitter your cup, you will not faint in the day of adversity, so long as the Bible is the more precious for all that you suffer. Fly from gloom and sadness to God’s word. Fly from the darts of the fowler to his word; and though you will find there every thing to instruct and much to reprove you, you will there find that “all things work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose.”

VII. SORROW AT THE THRONE OF GRACE.

"Is any among you afflicted? *let him pray.*" We cannot misunderstand nor misinterpret this apostolic injunction, nor doubt as to those to whom it is definitely addressed. Are there those who are suffering from poverty? They are the afflicted. Want, dependence, and mortification are a bitter cup to the proud and selfish heart. To be cast upon the cold charities of this heartless world, is to be a man of sorrows. Are there those who are suffering from the neglect or contempt of others? They are the afflicted. Their sorrows may never be told, but remain shut up within their own bosoms; but they are sad and depressing sorrows. Are there those who suffer from oppression and wrong? They are

the afflicted. Such were the afflictions of the psalmist when Ahithophel deserted and Shimei cursed him, and Saul and Absalom thirsted for his blood. Are there those who suffer from unjust imputations and false invective? They are the afflicted. To an honorable mind, no trial is more severe than the pestilential breath of calumny and reproach. Are there those who suffer from disappointments and losses? They are the afflicted. "The rich man fades away in his ways." His property is lost on the ocean, or destroyed by fire, or injured by accident, or torn from him by dishonesty and fraud; and he feels the loss. Are there those who suffer from trying bereavements? They are the afflicted. God has removed the desire of their eyes with a stroke; lover and friend are taken away, and their acquaintance, into darkness. Man goeth to his long home, and

the mourners go about the streets. Are there those who suffer from pain and sickness? They are the afflicted. "In the morning they say, Would to God it were evening; and in the evening, Would to God it were morning." They are "made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed unto them."

Afflictions like these crave alleviation. What shall it be? You cannot relieve the poverty of the poor, nor reverse the sentence of neglect and contempt, nor arrest the arm of oppression and cruelty, nor seal the lips of the calumniator, nor recompense the losses of the unfortunate, nor bring back the departed from the tomb, nor heal the maladies of the body or mind. It is no comfort to counsel these children of sorrow, that since it is their allotment to suffer, it must be their allotment to endure. Endurance does

not relieve one pang, and only abandons the hope of relief. You may counsel them to forget their trials ; but memory cannot bid sorrow be gone, so long as the heart bleeds. You may counsel them to drown their sorrows in the cares of the world, and by a resort to its gay companions and fashionable amusements. But miserable, miserable comforters are they all.

The afflicted must look higher than the world. They must look away beyond the everlasting hills whence cometh their help. The children of sorrow feel their helplessness ; nor is there any such relief as that which is found at the throne of heavenly grace. Let them bear their sorrows to the closet, to the family altar, and to the sanctuary. If you have hitherto lived a prayerless life, let your afflictions urge you to pray, and instruct you to come to the throne to obtain mercy,

and find grace to help in the time of need. If you are a man of prayer, let your afflictions urge you to retire from the world, and to be much alone with God. You will learn there to know more of him, to love him more, and trust him more. Your murmuring heart will learn to be still there; you will lay your hand upon your mouth, and say, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee?"

The world little know the satisfaction which the children of sorrow enjoy, when in the exercise of a filial spirit, and by a living faith in the great Mediator, they hold intercourse with God, and come near, even to his seat, and fill their mouth with arguments. They repair then to the Being who can remove or sanctify their sorrows. He said to the father of the faithful, "I am the Almighty God: fear not; I am thy shield, and thine ex-

ceeding great reward." He is the God of creation, of providence, and of grace. He can avert the sorrows they feel. He can lift the needy from the dunghill, and set him among princes. He can extort from their enemies the tribute of affection and homage. He can cover them with his feathers, and under his wings they shall trust. He can hide them in the secret of his presence from the pride of man. He can keep them secretly in a position from the strife of tongues. He can rebuke the devourer for their sakes, and give them a name and a place better than that of sons or of daughters. He can bid the destroyer put up his sword into its scabbard. In every instance he will remove the afflictions of the suppliant where it is best for him that they should be removed. And where he does not see fit to remove them, he will make them the means of a more progressive

holiness and spiritual comfort. His grace shall be sufficient for these children of sorrow, teaching them by this salutary discipline to live above the world and walk with God. Afflictions are to the soul what storms and frost are to the earth. For a while they deform the face of nature ; they tell us of its solitude and barrenness and desertion ; and it feels like winter as we pass over its fields ; but they prepare the soil for the verdure and promise of the harvest.

This near intercourse with God is also the direct way to remove from his people the cause of their afflictions. As we have already seen, they are like the refiner's crucible. Mourners who never pray, instead of being made better by their sorrows, are made worse. Like Pharaoh, they harden their hearts, and become insolent and rebellious. In the day of their adversity, they sin faster

and stronger than ever. But it is not so with those who, in the time of their tribulation, enter into their chambers and shut the doors about them. They find not only a better mind under their afflictions, but present comfort and support. These God alone is able to impart, and will impart to those who seek his face. It is a sweet thought, that there is one gracious Being who has access to the mind, even when the body is enervated by the debility, or racked by the torture of disease. Sorrow has a heart of exquisite tenderness—a heart whose thousand chords yield harmony or loose discord, as they are touched by human hands or divine.

“No wounds like those a wounded spirit feels ;
No cure for such till God, who makes them,
heals.”

He alone can support and cheer the soul when blasted by the storm and stung

by the arrows of adversity. His still small voice reaches the sufferer's ear in the dungeon, and soothes his fears in the burning, fiery furnace. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, into which the righteous runneth, and is safe." When the fountains of the great deep are broken up, and the windows of heaven are opened, they are safely embosomed in the ark. There stands the promise: "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." The afflicted have trusted in God, and in so doing have never been confounded. When the atrocious Herod beheaded John the Baptist, the disciples took up the body and buried it, and "went and told Jesus." When the women at the sepulchre trembled, a voice came to them, saying, "Be not affrighted; ye seek Jesus, who was crucified." When the exiled disciple fell down as one dead before the

overwhelming glory of his divine Lord, the Saviour said to him, “Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore; and have the keys of hell and of death.” The sorrows of the bereaved are not spread before Jesus in vain. No being in the universe has a deeper sympathy with them; “in all their afflictions he is afflicted; the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them.” When he was on the earth, the poor, the sorrowing, and the miserable everywhere sent forth the cry, “Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David.” He “had compassion on the multitude;” he “had compassion” on the man possessed with devils; he “had compassion” on the widow of Nain. He invites all “who labor and are heavy-laden” to come to him and find rest. There is no cloud so

dark but the light of his countenance can turn the shadow of death into the morning, and no mourning so sad but he can give songs in the night. He does more than pity; he turns their mourning into joy. This is his character, this is his office; and though now exalted at the right hand of God, it is that he may "*comfort all that mourn.*"

It is the mission of sorrow therefore to take the mourner by the hand, and lead him to the throne of heavenly grace. There the afflicted find consolation; there "a portion shall be given unto six, yea, unto seven." *Behold, he prayeth,* is the precursor of the divine presence. There are tokens of the divine favor which come only by prayer. Cheering, most cheering are those beams of the Sun of righteousness which thus fall upon the gloom and solitude of adversity. These sharp distresses would be overwhelming

but for free access to the Hearer of prayer. We can bear them, if God is with us. But if we have no faith nor hope in God—if all our resources are within ourselves, and all our refuge in this perishing world, and we have no access to the Father of mercies and God of all comfort—this is to have no hope, and to be without God in the world. Every prayerless man is thus ungodly, thus hopeless—ungodly and hopeless even in prosperity, much more in adversity. His path lies through a world of sorrow ; he is an orphan, and has no comforter. If those sorrows do but make you a man of prayer, you will make them welcome. We say then again, in the words of the apostle, “Is any among you afflicted ? let him pray.” Whatever be his conflicts or his trials, let him pray. Let him ask for any thing, for every thing he needs. “Open thy mouth wide, and I

will fill it. Ask, and it shall be given you. I am God," all-sufficient. Go to him daily, and live on his fulness. The greater your trials, the more ready is he to hear ; the greater your wants, the more ready is he to give. You cannot ask too much, you cannot hope too much from God. You cannot measure his munificence ; it is a boundless ocean, supplying the greatest wants as easily as the least. The greater the blessing, the more is he gratified with the giving. Go with the spirit of prayer, and you shall meet with no chilling repulse. Though a woman forget her sucking child, he will not, in the time of their tribulation, forget his mourners.

"I seem forsaken and alone,
I hear the tempest roar,
And every door is shut but one,
And that is mercy's door."

VIII. MEETNESS FOR HEAVEN
THROUGH SORROW.

God's people are dear to him. They are his because they are his creatures. He made them, and he made them "for himself." "The Lord, he is God ; he hath made us, and not we ourselves." Before he formed them, they were nothing. Just as "the sea is his," because "*he made it;*" just as the heavens are his, and the earth also is his, and the world and the fulness thereof are his, because *he has founded them*, so his people are his, because he called them into existence. "O Jacob and Israel, thou art my servant: *I have formed thee;* thou art my servant." His people are his absolute, inalienable property by this original and independent right of *creation*. They are and ever have been the

objects of his preserving, watchful, and paternal care. His Son has redeemed them ; they were given to him by his Father, and he bought them by his own precious blood.

“They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in the day that I make up my *jewels*.” They are his peculiar treasure, vessels of mercy and honor, and their names are all recorded in “the Lamb’s book of life.” They are “comely through the comeliness he puts upon them;” a “crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of our God,” and are destined to shine in his own kingdom for ever and ever. Yet by nature they are very unfitted for this high destiny. They scarcely thought of God, and never loved him. They cast off fear, and restrained prayer, and rebelled against him, though he nourished and brought them up as children.

There is a wide difference between a man who is born in sin, and the same man who dies a Christian. The first thing, in order to fit him for heaven, is that a work of grace should be begun in his heart. There has been a movement in heaven towards him. “We love Him because he first loved us.” God himself is the author and finisher of man’s redemption. There is the work which Jesus Christ has performed *for* his people, and there is the work which the Holy Spirit performs *in* them. The work performed without them has its counterpart in the work performed within them. God himself alone has the power to change their hearts, to form them new creatures, to make them vessels of mercy, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to the liberty wherewith Christ makes them free. “To as many as re-

ceived him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them which believe on his name ; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." None are fitted for heaven unless their hearts are thus turned from sin to holiness, and receive this hallowed and heavenward direction and tendency. "Verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." This is an important epoch in the history of every redeemed sinner, and the first effectual step in preparing him for heaven.

This work of grace must also be carried on ; and he which "began it will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Succor in the time of need is without themselves. If they are not overcome in the spiritual warfare, it is because the Captain of their salvation watches over

them, cares for them, and throws around them the shield of his salvation. “In them, that is, in their flesh, there dwelleth no good thing.” They are exposed to wander, to backslide, to plunge into fatal snares; nor would they ever return if he did not reclaim them; nor would they ever reach the celestial city if he did not “restore their souls, and lead them in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”

In making his people meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, the God of all grace, as has already been remarked, makes use of his word and ordinances. And it is when afflictive dispensations run through and are mingled with the means of grace and salvation, that they ordinarily enjoy heart-affecting views of invisible and eternal realities. Seasons of trial become seasons of divine manifestation.

God is pleased to manifest himself to them as he does not to the world. As such views are not essential to a state of grace, God gives them as their peculiar circumstances require. They are precious manifestations in the hour of trial; they leave lasting impressions on the mind, and are never forgotten. Sometimes they come upon them unexpected, and almost unsought: it may be in the darkest night of their sorrow, and when they feel most like pilgrims and strangers on the earth, and are most oppressed by the solitude of the wilderness. The saddest hours are often cheered by the most hallowed themes. Hallowed moments of celestial visitation are they when faith, with more than ordinary vividness, realizes the unseen world, and hope, full of immortality, sheds its fragrance over the soul and makes it long for heaven.

It is true that seasons of affliction are

not always thus favored. They are sometimes seasons of darkness and sore temptation, as Christian biography teaches us. "Alas," said Lady Russel, when her noble husband was sent to the block by the licentious and inexorable Charles, "I want liberty to approach nearer my heavenly Friend. But my understanding is clouded, my faith weak, sense strong, and Satan busy in filling my thoughts with false notions, difficulties, and doubts respecting a future state and the efficacy of prayer. My thoughts fly everywhere but to God." This is a most unhappy state of mind; but it is by no means of so frequent occurrence as those bright views which discover the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night.

The early Christians were remarkable examples of this hallowed influence of trials. They "*gloried* in tribulation," because it was the means of sustaining a

heavenward tendency of mind. They looked upon it as a privilege to suffer. "Unto you it is *given* in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on his name, but to *suffer* for his sake." Strange as it may appear to us, faith and suffering are both declared to be the *gift* of God. Such was the apostle Paul's love to his divine Master, that he could affirm, "I take *pleasure* in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake." These primitive disciples of the New Testament were the noblest of men. Their habitual language was, "For our light affliction, which is for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are unseen." Their character was formed and developed by the severe discipline of adversity. Trials indicated their sin-

cerity, proved the strength of their faith and the strength of their consolations, and gave brilliancy to the crown of their rejoicing. They were not more partakers in the sufferings of Christ, than they are the partakers in his glory. "We are joint-heirs with Christ," say they, "if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be glorified together." They "reckoned that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed."

If we ever get to heaven, we shall see that it was not our own wisdom or fidelity that brought us there. Every step we have taken would have been a false one, but for God. He moved first, and we did but follow as fast and as far as he drew us and led the way. Of all the events and circumstances which were either in themselves auspicious to our salvation or overruled to our spiritual

welfare, our trials will never be forgotten. Thousands upon thousands have been made meet for heaven by their trials. The fetters of gold which bound them to earth have been thus sundered, and even the ties of nature have been held by a looser hand. They would not live always, but desired rather to depart and be with Christ. This world does not compensate for the sorrow and pain and conflict and sin of living in it beyond the bounds of our appointed time. True Christians have more and better friends in heaven than they have on earth, and who wait to give them a joyful greeting. It is no marvel that they sometimes "struggle and pant to be free," and long to "put on their blood-bought attire," and "wonder and worship" with those who, like themselves, are "washed, and justified, and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

How many, think you, are now in heaven who bless God even for the bitterest cup? How many can say, "I dallied with sin and trifled with the Tempter; I cropped flowers on the brink of the precipice, but found a gravestone there which told me of one I loved. I had gone astray, but my grief agitated me, my depression humbled me, my sins alarmed me. My idol was there, and my heart bled. I thought of death and eternity, and was separated from them only by the breath of my nostrils. God smote me, but he made all my bed in my sickness. I was afraid to die, but when I came to the conflict, I found the foe vanquished. Death was swallowed up in victory. It is all reality now, all heaven, all joy, all praise to God my Redeemer, God all-sufficient, God all in all."

Sanctified afflictions will not be for-

gotten in heaven. "Thou shalt *remember* all the way thy God led thee in the wilderness." To suffer God's will is as truly honorable to him and profitable to our own spiritual interests, as to do his will. They are equally acts of obedience. When sufferings are endured with a Christian spirit and wisely employed, not only is the work of God thereby manifested in the sufferers, but their own future blessedness is thereby promoted. If they were not always happy in their trials, they will be happy in their triumphs, happy in their eternal home. When the exiled apostle was in Patmos, one of the elders before the throne said to him, "What are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence come they?" The apostle was unable to answer the question, and replied, "Sir, thou knowest." "These are they," said the angelic messenger, "which came out

of GREAT TRIBULATION, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." The most afflicted and desolate will then prove the love and faithfulness of the severest chastisements. "There remaineth a rest for the people of God," a perfect and everlasting rest. If by marvellous grace in Christ Jesus you ever enter it, you will look back with grateful admiration at the tender care and covenant faithfulness of Him

who loved you. And as you look back and call to mind how often you grieved his Spirit and forfeited his love, and how, but for these desolating afflictions, you never would have entered the heavenly city, you may well say with dear Richard Baxter, "When he broke thy heart, as well as when he bound it up, thy blessed Redeemer was saving thee." With adoring surprise you may exclaim with him, "O blessed way, and thrice-blessed end ! Is my mourning and my heavy walking come to this ? Are all my afflictions come to this ? Blessed gales, that have blown me into such a harbor ! Oh what a God there is in heaven!"

Such is the mission of sorrow. Its lessons cannot be learned from the teachings of human wisdom. It may be you have been thrown upon a bed of sickness, and even painful and lingering ag-

ony. The bloom of health fades on your cheek, and wasting debility premonishes you of the grave. God grant that celestial visions may throng around your pillow, and that underneath that aching head you may find the everlasting arms. It may be "a wife of youth" has sunk to the grave, and the heart that watched her lingering decay, amid its alternate hopes and fears, sinks under the blow. And can you not lean on an almighty arm, and make your refuge in the shadow of his wings? Perhaps you have seen a favorite child sinking under a disease that was appointed to do its fatal work. You have turned from the scene with sighing. Your fears have been realized. The flower is cut down, and withers in the grave. Mourning parent, strive to look upward. It may cost you tears; but God would teach you that his favor, without earthly comforts, is worth

more to you than all earthly comforts without his favor. He sent this rushing calamity on purpose to throw a temporary cloud over the sun of time, and open to you the brighter scenes of a sinless world. He would cement, rather than sunder the bond that unites you to the departed. That bright spirit has left you, and your fondest, proudest wishes—dust is upon them. These sorrows have their mission.

“Your God, to call you homeward,
His *only Son* sent down ;
And now, still more to tempt your heart,
Has taken up *your own.*”

Of such is the kingdom of heaven. Your jewel shines in your Redeemer’s crown. Would you pluck that little star from his brow? If you could, would you call back the beloved one?

O ye who weep and ye who have wept, ye who are far from God and ye

who are brought nigh, come and learn from him the sweet supports of his truth and grace in the hour of trial, and the precious lessons which his Spirit inculcates in the school of affliction. Sorrow is the sad heritage of sin. Let it soften your heart and render it more susceptible to the influences of heavenly grace. Bow under these strokes of the rod, and then lift your eyes to the hills whence cometh your help. Mourning friends, though "you walk in the midst of trouble, God will revive you. Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion, according to the multitude of his mercies." These exhausting days and wearisome nights will soon be over. The aching head, the throbbing heart will ere-long be at rest. God's voice to you is, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee ; in a little wrath I hid my face from

thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown ;
No traveller ever reached that blest abode,
Who found not thorns and briars on his road."

IX. NO SORROW THERE.

In heaven at last. The days of mourning are ended. God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. To the wicked he says, "Woe unto you that laugh now; for ye shall mourn and weep;" to the righteous, "Blessed are ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh." Everlasting joy shall be upon their head, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

"O blessed way, and thrice-blessed end!" We are still in the wilderness, and have not yet reached that city of our God. We are still buffeting the storm, but pressing onward to the land where clouds and darkness are known no more. The soul of man in the present world is no true expression of its Maker's handiwork. Its elements are incongruous and discordant. It is a dis-

jointed mechanism ; unrefined and undirected, all its movements are ominous of disaster. It needs to pass through the furnace, before it shall come out in purity and brightness. So long as the people of God linger on these shores of time, they will not only be suffering, but sinning men. “I shall be *satisfied*,” says the Psalmist, “when I awake in thy likeness.” Nothing else *satisfies*. The regenerated soul thirsts for God, for the living God. The turbid and bitter waters of earth have served to prepare it for the pure river of life. Nor was the process completed until, at the grave’s mouth, the last chain that bound it to earth was dissolved. These infirmities and sins and sorrows will vanish then. Christ’s sorrowing followers are made like unto the angels ; they are “the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.”

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love him. That is a wondrous world of which the Saviour says, “Where I am, there also shall my servant be.” It has no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it. The glory and honor of the nations are gathered into it; there is no more curse; but the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him. The actual transition of the immortal spirit from time to eternity, from earth to heaven, no human eye ever beheld. No ear of man ever heard the shout, as the weary feet of the once mourning pilgrim were first planted on the long wished for shore, though guardian angels hovered over him as he passed through the dark valley.

There is no darkness now; the Lamb is the light thereof; they are the daz-

zling glories of eternal day. When the martyr Stephen fell, he exclaimed, "I see the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." And what must be the vision when the children of sorrow see him face to face, and know even as they are known; where "the ransomed of the Lord return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, and they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Well may they look to the rock whence they were hewn, and the hole of the pit whence they were digged. It was a world alienated from God, and where sorrow upon sorrow, and convulsion upon convulsion agitated it in a thousand forms. It is a mournful, a fearful retrospect they look upon, with only here and there a few radiations emerging from the general gloom. Well may they exclaim, Is

this the dark land from which we have been rescued, and this the wilderness we have travelled over?

And *how* were they rescued? They were partakers in the universal apostasy, and under the condemning sentence of that law which is holy, just, and good. It was not by works of righteousness which they had done, or ever could perform. They are redeemed sinners, and would have sunk under the weight of their iniquity, had not the God-man bore their sins in his own body on the tree. Not a thread, not a filament, not a fibre of their justifying righteousness was wrought by their own hands. And their personal holiness, whence was it? Who made them to differ from a world that lieth in wickedness, and from what they themselves once were? When days of trial came, and temptations assaulted them, and flesh and sense were arrayed

against them ; when there was conflict and tumult, and the subtle adversary went about seeking whom he might devour ; who stimulated them to watch and pray, and wrestle and overcome ? Whose unsleeping eye and unwearied arm and unchanging faithfulness cared for them in youth, in manhood, and in old age—at home and abroad, in health and in sickness, in storm and in sunshine ? And whose were those everlasting arms ever and anon thrown around them ; and whose that loving heart, giving them the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, lest they should be discouraged in the conflict, and never reach the heavenly land ? Many a youthful pilgrim who seemed to run well, grew weary and fainted, and turned back. The wilderness, as they look back upon it, is strewed with the fainting, the slumbering, the fallen, the

dead, the lost. From the cradle to the grave, and from the grave up to the heavenly city, every incident in their history, every joy and every pang of sorrow has been under the control of infinite love. Even the hairs of their head were all numbered. Will it not be delightful to look back and see how the outstretched arm was spread over them, and how they were borne as on eagles' wings ?

Oh what adoring, what humble thankfulness will then take the place of that restive and depressed and murmuring spirit with which they so unsubmissively endured their trials in the present world. Sweet reminiscences these, that make the mourner humble. Blessed retrospect, that prostrates the soul in the dust, and makes it fall at the feet of Jesus, and cover its angelic face with its wings. Profound will be the veneration with

which they enter into His presence and contemplate his awful majesty, yet calm and tranquil as the sea of glass on which they stand to show forth his praise. Never will they again love the creature more than the Creator. They are lost and swallowed up, not in the floods of earthly sorrow, but the ocean of heavenly joy—not in themselves and those they loved on the earth, but in the uncreated, undying glories of the Infinite One. It will be the wonder of their eternity that they are thus filled with all the fulness of God, and that, plunging as they once were in miry places, they now float in that ocean of light and love where there is neither bottom nor shore.

The humility of heaven is one of the brightest features of its character, and one of the sources of its sweetest joy. Honors they have; but they cast their

crowns before the throne. If “pride was not made for man,” last of all will it be found in heaven. Its empire on earth is world-wide and powerful; it reigns in hell; but in the spirits of just men made perfect it shall find no place. Amid the splendors of that everlasting and glorious world, every laurel withers that is not wreathed around the Saviour’s brow. If the religion of earth is the religion of heaven in miniature, the purest gem that adorns it is this heaven-born humility. It is a sacred thing, because it is so humble and lies so low. We should love to think of that blessed world if it were only for its humility. When those ransomed spirits, weary of the conflicts of earth, repose under the shadow of the tree of life, and there, at the feet of the enthroned Lamb, reflect upon the way they have been led through the wilderness, and look down upon the agonies of

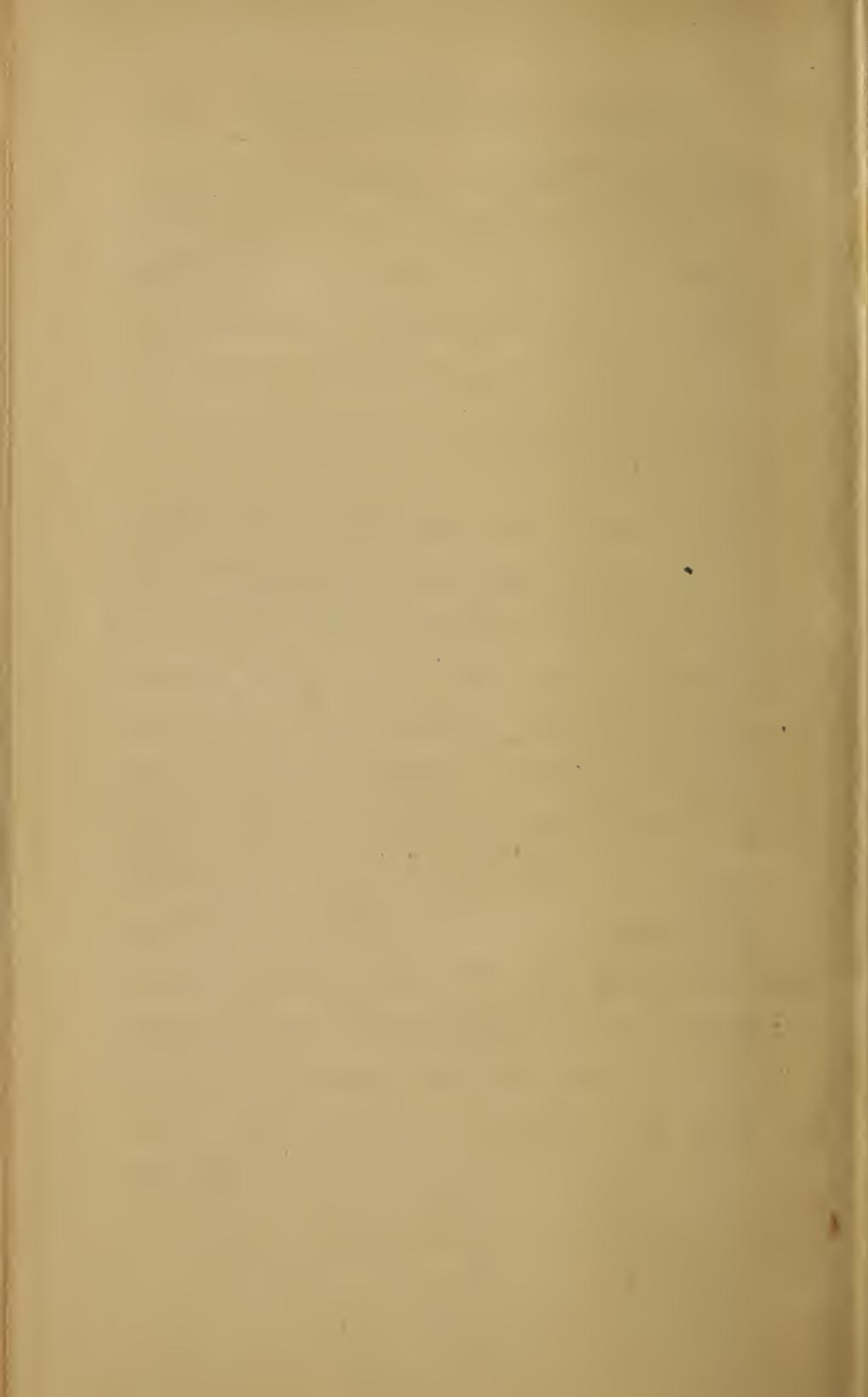
that eternal pit from which they have been rescued, how can it be otherwise than that a deep and everlasting sense of their unworthiness and ill-desert should add to the fulness of their gratitude and joy ? They are perfectly humble, and perfectly happy. From the hour of their conversion, redeeming love has been their theme ; but never till now, as they stand on Mount Zion, have they given utterance to the ecstacy of their joy. And even here, on this low earth, where the graves of the departed are scattered and the cypress mourns, voices are not wanting, embarrassed and suppressed it may be by their tears, to utter the song, "Thou art worthy ; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood." Oh that I could direct the eyes of the mourner upward, and in these hours of darkness bid his heart rest on that blessed world where, in a few short

hours, all, both among the living and the dead, who fear God and love his Son, will meet in holier and more intimate fellowship. "Up there," sin and sorrow and death never enter. "Up there,"

"Sighs and farewells are a sound unknown."

"Up there," they sit together in heavenly places, and drink the wine new with Christ in his Father's kingdom. "Up there," the holy men and women who parted at the grave, redeemed parents and their redeemed children, whom the voice of the archangel and the trump of God have summoned from the sleep of centuries, will meet, not to recount their own sorrows, but to tell of His who came to the humiliation of the manger and the agonies of the cross to rescue them from endless weeping and infinite despair.





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